



Munich Personal RePEc Archive

In Disputatione Nascitur Veritas

Orkodashvili, Mariam

Vanderbilt University

1 December 2008

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/16420/>

MPRA Paper No. 16420, posted 23 Jul 2009 06:12 UTC

In Disputatione Nascitur Veritas

The essay attempts to discuss the main issues regarding the features and functions of university. It also tries to identify the challenges that the University of the Future will face. The main argument that the essay makes is that through constant search for the truth, through continuous discussions and ‘disputations’, the university should retain its core function that is the production of knowledge. The continuous struggles between academic, sociocultural, political and economic forces have always helped the academia to preserve its unique character. The essay adheres to the well-known belief that the truth is born in constant discussions and ‘disputations’ (*in disputatione nascitur veritas*).

There will always be different ideas and controversies regarding the values, features and functions that the academia should retain, abandon or revise. There will always be discussions on the revision of curriculum, on the introduction of new fields of study, on the market-smart and mission-centered (Zemsky et al, 2001, 2005) dichotomies of the character and management of university, on the new pedagogical methods of instruction and student-professor relationships. But these controversies should in no way be considered as drawback. On the contrary, exactly through these controversies and discussions will the higher education be able to maintain its essential value of the search for truth and knowledge production. Exactly these controversies constitute the unique feature of academia that should never be lost. The assumption is that the controversies create dynamics, and the dynamics condition the progressive movement of university forward. Hence, if the controversies are no longer present, the dynamics is stagnated and there is no more progress in academia.

The essay attempts to support this viewpoint by discussing three main aspects of higher education: curricular, pedagogical and organizational.

The core issue regarding the ***curricular aspect*** of university revolves around the controversy between the overemphasis on applied market-oriented fields and decreasing value of humanities that were traditionally believed to develop cultural capabilities in the society (Readings, 1996). The lack of resources, hence the necessity for business-type ways of search for finances, and the obvious downgrading of sociocultural values of academia, often expressed in the negligence of humanities, raised the perennial issues that are critical for the future development of higher education.

Controversies on the future fate of the curriculum of academia were always put on the agenda of educators and policymakers. The issue (Yale Report, 1828) started with the fixed curriculum in antebellum colleges that derived from classical study, and was afterwards revised by progressivism movement with practice-orientation. Charles Eliot's inaugural address in 1869 and the introduction of elective system gave rise to discussions over curriculum, while Jeremiah Day (1827) criticized impractical collegiate curriculum and offered to make it more applicable by introducing the courses that would connect students' education with their future jobs. He offered to add new subjects (geology, mineralogy, political economy, etc.) to the old ones to adapt colleges to the 'business character of the nation' (Lucas, 2006: 132-133). Lucas (2006) notes that 'Spirited defenses of the classical curriculum competed in the nineteenth century with heartfelt appeals for more practical trade training and professional learning, symbolizing the tension between intellectualist and utilitarian aims in higher learning' (Lucas, 2006: 334). Afterwards, the curriculum issue underwent landmark discussions by Booker T. Washington (1895) and W.E.B Du Bois (1903), where Washington supported utilitarian vocational instruction and DuBois advocated liberal education.

Later, Newfield (2008) emphasized the ongoing power struggles between different agents in politics and economy and blamed the Rights for contributing to the devaluation of humanities. According to him, the loss of balance between economic profits and sociocultural values, and 'devaluation' of humanities brought about the major challenges for the future of academia. The inability of humanities to redefine their utility caused their fatalism. And recently, the Spellings commission (2006) was criticized for neglecting the importance of humanities while drafting the future strategies for the development of higher education.

Hutchins (1935) also regretted the disappearance of liberal arts education and saw creative thought as an important precondition for the democratic development of academia. 'I beg to lay down this fundamental proposition that every profession requires for its continuous development the existence of centers of creative thought' (Hutchins, 1935). Besides, he criticized the extreme isolation of academic fields owing to professionalization and the inability of interdisciplinary dialogue. This caused the increase of anti-intellectualism. Hence, he envisioned the return of intellectualism in the restoration of the dialogue between fields. Hutchins' criticisms could act as a kind of recommendation for the future university to develop curriculum with the emphasis on interdisciplinary studies. Besides,

Port Huron Statement (1962) noted the loss of the feature of academia that is so essential for its development, i.e. the feature of controversies and debates in search of truth.

Culture wars of the 1960s raised further issues and debates on academia. Hunter (1991) talked about the tensions between orthodoxy and progressivism that affected the shaping of curriculum. ‘In the view of most progressives, the forces of traditionalism and moral orthodoxy present the chief threat to academic freedom in the curriculum’ (Hunter, 1991: 214). Besides, he mentioned the debates over ‘multiculturalism’ in the curriculum that were triggered by human rights’ movement and the demands for the inclusion of interests of minorities in higher education. He pointed that the main debate was over the white male domination in the provision of principal works for the politicized curriculum. ‘The debate over multiculturalism takes even more controversial form in curricular and extracurricular programs, some mandatory, that are designed to “increase sensitivity” to racial and cultural diversity in the university community’ (Hunter, 1991: 216).

The important issue to be considered in the curricular aspect of future higher education is the necessity to overcome ethnocentrism and have an open-minded approach to different cultures. This is especially important in the times of increasing international student and professor mobility where intercultural awareness plays essential role in designing new curricula that would be applicable to different cultural contexts. In his work *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) Allan Bloom talked about the relativity of truth and the necessity to develop the notion of cultural relativism. He stated that the relativity of truth was the condition of a free society, and this relativity was achieved through constant questioning of being right and trying to understand different cultures, nationalities and ethnicities. ‘The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all’ (Bloom, 1987: 26). According to him, the relativity of truth would help the public overcome prejudices regarding different ethnicities. This would be equally beneficial and enriching for the dominant majorities and ethnic minorities. Therefore, cultural relativity could be utilized both in curricular and pedagogical aspects of higher education, where the professor-student relationships would be based on developing cultural awareness through dialogues and discussions that would be grounded on the curriculum with intercultural focus.

Later, Readings (1996) introduced the notion of *the ruined university*. He described the shift from *the university of culture* to *the university of excellence* as a process where cultural values were lost. He associated the University of

Culture with the nation-state as envisioned by German philosophers, whereas the University of Excellence presented a techno-bureaucratic institution characterized by disunity, fragmentation and commodification of knowledge. 'As a non-referential unit of value entirely internal to the system, excellence marks nothing more than the moment of technology's self-reflection' (Readings, 1996: 39). Readings further argued that the appeal to excellence indicated that the idea of University had lost its content. 'My argument is that this new interest in the pursuit of excellence indicates a change in University's function' (Readings, 1996: 13). Readings proposed the abandonment of disciplinary knowledge because everything had been commodified and offered engaging in rigorous dialogue. 'Hence I suggest that we make the market in courses a matter of Thought and discussion' (Readings, 1996: 177).

Lemann (2000) also criticized higher education. The introduction of highly selective SAT exams bifurcated the system and hampered the goal of higher education to open up opportunities to masses. He supported greater national authority, government involvement and the introduction of national curriculum and National Achievement Test. 'Decent schooling, the absolute prerequisite to a decent life in America today, should be thought of as something that government guarantees to every citizen as a matter of right' (Lemann, 2000: 348-349).

Hence, the future challenge of academia could lie in the redefinition of field priorities, its mission and in the maintenance of balance between applied sciences and humanities through dialogues and discussions. The features that would present the most danger to academia (and that should be abandoned) would be adhering to curricular conservatism or falling either in one extremity or another.

Discussions on *pedagogical aspect* of academia developed around the changing conceptions on student-professor relationships and the ways teaching, learning and research were conducted at universities. Starting with oral disputations and classroom recitations back in antebellum colleges, the pedagogical techniques went through several stages of development. Promotion of academic freedom (AAUP, 1915) in the beginning of the 20th century and the principles of *Lernfreiheit*, *Lehrfreiheit* and *Wissenschaft*, and later on the development of new pedagogy with professors acting as experts in the provision of research, teaching and service (Thelin, 2004) - were all different pedagogical methods that paved the way towards present-day instruction methods.

John Dewey (1938) talked about the importance of experience in education. He stated that new generations learned through experiences. He emphasized the importance of pragmatism in education implying child-centered

learning. The ideas expressed by Dewey might as well be successfully practised and developed in the University of Future. Another issue regarding pedagogical approach concerns moving from one extreme doctrine *in loco parentis* (overemphasized care of faculty for students) to another extreme - *faculty in absentia* (faculty involvement in research and negligence of teaching) (Kerr, 2001). In both cases the dissatisfaction of students was vividly present. But exactly this dissatisfaction and protests sustained the dynamics of academia and helped evolve the balanced midpoint for pedagogy not to fall in either of the extremes. Therefore, the recommendation for the future university would be to keep the balance and avoid either over control of students or total negligence of teaching duties. Moreover, the Port Huron Statement advocated the development of the skills of participatory democracy that would 'bring people out of isolation'. It viewed the development of this skill in youth as an essential part of higher education (Port Huron Statement, 1962). Furthermore, Mario Savio (in Rossinow, 2002), emphasized the importance of personal liberation and political emancipation by starting the Free Speech Movement. He viewed the university as a place of oppression that needed social change. He called University 'a machine, complete with IBM computer cards that reduced students to mere numbers' (in Rossinow, 2002: 541). Student 'alienation' became the common word. Healing student alienation was envisioned through commitment to social justice and engagement with social issues that would be the feature of 'authentic person' (Rossinow, 545). While talking about the culture wars Hunter also emphasized the importance of academic freedom and open-minded enquiry (Hunter, 1991: 220). He viewed open-minded academic enquiry as a necessary condition for the search of truth that is in constant process 'because reality is ever unfolding' (Hunter, 1991: 44). Referring to James Duderstadt, D'Souza mentioned that 'our university has a moral imperative to address the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic groups' (D'Souza, 1991: 16). Whereas, Readings (1996) offered building *the community of dissensus* that would maintain academic dynamics through discussions between the students and professors. Therefore, debates over multiplicity of issues and the inclusion of the interests of minorities with the open-minded approach can be further developed in the University of the Future to maintain its constant development, progress and refinement of pedagogical techniques.

As regards to *organizational aspects* of academia, since the Harvard Charter of 1650, which proclaimed the idea of a strong president, the struggle has been ongoing between administrative and academic sides and student body. The structural changes of academia, its expansion and departmentalization brought about the bureaucratization of the

institution, and the necessity of functional change to organize the increasing staff and student body (Veysey, 1965). The development process from the increasing influence of administration to the emergence of a large impersonal 'multiversity' with administrators, professors and students somewhat detached from each other (Kerr, 2001), raised numerous issues and challenges regarding the best ways of the organization of the institution. The most vivid trait that can be traced is the adaptability of university to changing environment and the continuous disputes on the distribution of authority, duties, rights and obligations among academia, students and administration. D'Souza discussed 'victim's revolution' during culture wars where 'the revolutionaries inhabit the offices of presidents, provosts, deans, and other administrators' (D'Souza, 1991: 15). Referring to French philosophers Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, Tomasky (1996) raised the issues of identity politics and power relationships that influenced the 1960s movements in the U.S. Hence, the human rights movements of the 1960s contributed considerably to the transformations in academia that were reflected not only on curricular and pedagogical levels, but on organizational level as well.

Lemann (2000) criticized the complexity of university organization. 'That our universities have evolved into a national personnel department represents the striking of a complicated bargain...Universities are now political and economic institutions' (Lemann, 2000: 345). Besides, in his criticisms of the tendencies in modern academia, Readings (1996) talked about the 'relinquishing of the University's role as a model of even the contractual social bond in favor of the structure of an autonomous bureaucratic corporation' (Readings, 1996: 35).

The assumption could be made that extreme power of administration might lead to authoritative and constrained organization, while totally unregulated system might breed chaos. Therefore, keeping the balance should be the optimal way of organization. Besides, preserving disputes and discussions between different parties would maintain university dynamics, its pluralistic nature and would condition its progress. As Readings (1996) notes, debates would sustain university as a continuous process, and not an end product.

In conclusion, centrality and fragility of university in the long-lasting debates over the functions of higher education and its role in the interplay of wider socioeconomic, political and cultural forces is an ever recurrent issue. It seems that exactly these debates called for constant public attention towards academia and helped retain its core function of knowledge production through the dynamics of controversies and *disputations*. Therefore, as already

mentioned in the beginning, the controversial character of academia should be maintained to condition its balanced development and avoid the dangers of its stagnation.

References:

AAUP Statement of Principles (1915). <http://www.akronaaup.org/documents/AAUP1915.pdf>

Bloom, A. (1987). *The closing of the American mind. How higher education has failed democracy and impoverished the souls of today's students*. Simon and Schuster, New York.

Dewey, J. (1938). Experience and education. In M. J. Adler (Ed-in-Chief) (1990) *Great Books of the Western World. Philosophy and religion: selections from the twentieth century*, v.55, Encyclodaedia Britannica, INC., pp. 99-125.

D'Souza, D. (1991). *Illiberal education. The politics of race and sex on campus*. The Free Press, New York.

Hunter, J. D. (1991). *Culture wars: the struggle to define America*. Basic Books, Harper Collins Publishers.

Hutchins, R. M. (1935). *The higher learning in America*. Chicago, 1935.

<http://www.ditext.com/hutchins/hutch0.html>

Kerr, C. (2001). *The uses of the university*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Lemann, N. (2000). *The big test: the secret history of the American meritocracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Lucas, C. (2006). *American higher education. A history, Second Edition*. Palgrave, Macmillan.

Miller, C. et al., (2006). *A test of leadership: charting the future of U.S. Higher Education*, Washington: U.S Department of Education.

<http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/final-report.pdf>

Newfield, C. (2008). *Unmaking the Public University*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England.

Port Huron Statement (1962).

http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos?SDS_Port_Huron.html

Reactions to the Spellings Commission Report. (2006). *Commentary*.

<http://www.highereducation.org/crosstalk/ct0406/Spellings.pdf>

- Readings, B. (1996). *The university in ruins*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England.
- Roherty, B. M. (1997). The price of passive resistance in financing higher education. In P. M. Callan and J. E. Finney with K. R. Bracco and W. R. Doyle (Eds.) (1997). *Public and private financing of higher education. Shaping public policy for the future*. American Council on Education. ORYX Press, Series on Higher Education, pp. 3 – 29.
- Rossinow, D. (2002). Mario Savio and the politics of authenticity. In R. Cohen and R. Zelnik (Eds.) (2002) *Free Speech Movement: Reflections on Berkeley in the 1960s*, Berkeley, pp.533-551.
- The Harvard College Charter of 1650. <http://hul.harvard.edu/huarc/charter.html>
- The Yale Report (1828). http://www.higher-ed.org/resources/Yale_Report.htm
- Thelin, J. R. (2004). *A history of American higher education*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.
- Tomasky, M. (1996). *Left for dead: the life, death, and possible resurrection of progressive politics in America*. The Free press, New York.
- Veysey, L. R. (1965). *The emergence of the American University*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Washington, B. T. (1895). *Atlanta compromise*. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/39>
- W.E.B Du Bois (1903). *The talented tenth*. <http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1148.htm>
- Zemsky, R., Shaman, S., Shapiro, D. B. (2001). *Higher education as competitive enterprise: when markets matter*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Zemsky, R., Wegner, G. R., Massy, W. F. (2005). *Remaking the American university: market-smart and mission-centered*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ.